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AUTHOR Giovannini, Mary
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ABSTRACT

Seventy students in a college business communications course participated in a study to determine whether there were significant differences in students' attitudes toward the course when the traditional writing method or the word processing method was used. The study also sought to ascertain whether the traditional writing method developed a higher level of cognitive achievement in business communications than the word processing method. The sample was divided into two sections, with the traditional writing group completing the assignments by hand or typing, and the word processing group completing their assignments by dictating at a word processing center. Both groups were given the same letter writing test problems. Student attitudes toward the subject were surveyed in a pretest and a posttest, and cognitive achievement was measured by the combined mean scores of the letter writing test problems and by an objective posttest. No statistical differences between the groups were revealed by the attitude surveys or the objective posttest of cognitive achievement. However, analysis of the mean scores from the letter writing test problems indicated that the word processing group showed better skills in letter writing. (HTH)

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TEACHING BUSINESS COMMUNICATIONS BY THE TRADITIONAL WRITING AND THE WORD PROCESSING METHODS--A COMPARISON

by Mary Giovannini

Word processing represents change, and where a word processing system has been implemented, it is a testimonial to a break with the traditional way of dealing with administrative and correspondence support. Because word processing is new to the worlds of business and government, the impact for the business communications class is unknown.

Word processing, an efficient system of communicating one person's ideas to another person in typewritten form, is the nucleus of a new technological revolution taking place within offices everywhere.

Along with equipment, the words people, procedures, and systems appear. Word processing brings about a better utilization of people, a company's most important resource. The concept of word processing developed from an attempt to reduce office costs by using dictation and typing equipment. A system emerged for handling people, procedures, and equipment to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of business writing.

Statement of the Problem

It is generally recognized that word processing will be an integral part of the business world of the 1980's. To be effective in the

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Dr. Giovannini is Assistant Professor of Business and Office Education, Northeast Missouri State University, Kirksville. This report is based on her doctoral research completed for the Ph.D. degree in Vocational Education at University of Missouri--Columbia, under the direction of Dr. Milton Miller.

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business world of the 1980's, everyone involved will need to be knowledgeable about word processng. Since business deals with volumes of paperwork, it is imperative that this communication process be fully utilized if business is to operate more efficiently and cost effectively than at the present. The business communications course is the logical place for these cognitive achievements to be developed. A positive attitude toward business communications should be developed.

A search of the literature has revealed only two studies which are somewhat related to this study, but none that indicate the relative effectiveness of the word processing method of teaching in the business communications course. This lack of evidence provided the focal point for this study.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to ascertain if there were significant differences in students' attitudes toward the business communications course when the traditional writing method or the word processing method was used. In addition, the study was to ascertain whether the traditional writing method develops a higher level of cognitive achievement in business communications than the word processing method.

More specifically, the study was designed to answer the following research questions:

1. What is the relative effect of teaching business communications by the traditional writing method and by the word processing method upon the attitude of college students enrolled in a Business Communications class?

2. What is the relative effect of teaching business communications by the traditional writing method and by the word processing method upon cognitive achievement of college students enrolled in a Business Communications class?

Review of Related Literature

The review of literature revealed no studies directly related to the word processing method of teaching business communications. An Eric search and a search of Psychological Abstracts revealed no studies connecting word processing and the business communications class. However, two studies, one by Stephen Lewis and one by John Melrose are somewhat related to this study.

Stephen Lewis' study ascertained the relationship of changes in business letter writing in organizations using word processing to selected characteristics of the organization. A two-part questionnaire was developed to survey word processing center supervisors and word processing users. Results indicated that the direct telephone dictation to a word processing center was used to originate business letters to a greater extent in large organizations (250 or more administrative employees) than in medium (25-249 administrative employees) or small (1-24 administrative employees) organizations. Business letter writers in organizations that offered in-service training techniques originated more of their letters by direct telephone dictation to a word processing center than letter writers who had not received training. Thus, business letter originators who have not had training in dictation techniques used personal handwriting and personal typewriting to a greater extent than writers who had training.

John Melrose's study ascertained differences in business letter composition skill between an experimental group taught to compose business letters through machine dictation and a control group taught to compose business letters through handwriting. The experimental group received instruction in machine dictation and actually dictated

letters as part of the classroom instruction, while the control group wrote letters by hand. No significant difference was found in letter composition skill between students who dictated letters and students who wrote letters by hand.

Procedures

Population and Sample. The sample for this study consisted of 70 students, from a population of 250 students enrolled in BOED277, Business Communications, in the business education area of the Division of Business at Northeast Missouri State University, during the spring semester, 1980. The sections were assigned to the instructor as a part of the regular class load. Business Communications is a three semester hour course required of all one- and two-year certificate students, as well as business administration and accounting majors.

The sample consisted of two intact groups: one taught by the researcher at 8:30 a.m. on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday; and the other one taught by the researcher at 10:30 a.m. on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday.

Statement of Hypotheses. The general research hypothesis of this study was that significant differences exist in attitude and cognitive achievement among students having experience with the traditional writing method and the word processing method.

Stated in the null form for the purpose of statistical analysis, the following null hypotheses were tested at the .05 level of significance:

Ho_1: No statistically significant difference exists between the scores on an attitude scale administered at the end of the semester for treatment (Group A) and treatment (Group B).

Ho_2: No statistically significant difference exists between the means of the combined scores on the letter writing test problems completed at the end of the eighth, tenth, and twelfth weeks of the semester for treatment (Group A) and treatment (Group B).

Ho_3: No statistically significant difference exists between the scores on an objective posttest administered at the end of the semester for treatment (Group A) and treatment (Group B).

Definition of Terms. "Attitude" is student disposition toward and reaction to business communications as revealed by responses on Remmers' Attitude Scale. Form A was used as a pretest. Form B was used as a posttest.

"Traditional Writing Method" involves classroom procedures using lectures; evaluating letters, memos, and reports; and producing mailable copy either in typewritten or in handwritten form by each student.

"Word processing method" involves classoom procedures using lectures; evaluating letters, memos, and reports; and originating letters, memos, and reports by dictation.

Treatments. Both treatment groups were taught by the researcher. Each occupied identical classrooms at different times during the morning for instructional sessions.

The same textbook, entitled Effective Communication in Business, was utilized for both treatment groups. The same assignments were given to both groups of students, but the treatment method of each group was different. The students taught by the traditional writing method completed each assignment by handwriting or typewriting. The letter writing test problems which were handwritten by the students were typewritten by the researcher before being evaluated. This was to facilitate evaluation on an equal basis. The students who experienced the word processing method went to the word processing center

to dictate all letters, memos, and reports. These were transcribed by the word processing center and returned to the students for corrections, or to be handed in.

Initial Status of Groups. Since it was not possible to obtain treatment groups for this study by completely random methods, it was necessary to ascertain the initial status of all eight sections of Business Communications being taught the spring semester, 1980. The initial status of the groups was determined by pretesting for cognitive achievement in business communications. Analysis of variance was used to ascertain whether the two groups selected differed significantly from the other sections on this measure. Finding no significant differences, there was no need to adjust statistically by the analysis of covariance technique.

The following information was obtained about the students in the control and experimental sections only: (1) A pretest was administered to ascertain attitudes held by the student toward the subject matter. (2) Academic achievement as evidenced by grade point average, and (3) year in school were obtained from the student and verified in the registrar's office. (4) Age was obtained from the student. Correlations were computed between cognitive achievement in business communications and academic achievement, year in school, and age.

Pilot Study. An administrative pilot study was conducted during the fall semester, 1979, to evaluate the materials for the study. The tests were assembled, procedures were tested, and timelines were established to make certain that the various units to be studied coincided with the appropriate letter writing test problem.

Variables. The study investigated two dependent variables:

First, attitude differences based upon Remmers' Attitude Scale. Form A was administered as a pretest. Form B was administered as a posttest on the last class period of the semester.

Second, cognitive achievement based upon combined mean scores of the letter writing test problems completed at the end of the eighth, tenth, and twelfth weeks of the semester. A letter writing test problem is any activity of a problem-solving nature which involves writing or dictating on the part of the student. This activity was completed in a testing situation and evaluated according to the evaluation scale developed by Perkins. Each letter was evaluated by three graders, after training sessions were held. The raters were faculty members at Northeast Missouri State University who were teaching Business Communications.

Cognitive achievement was also measured by the scores of an objective posttest administered on the last class period of the semester. Inman's Principles of Business Writing Test was used for the measure. The same test was administered as a pretest.

The independent variables were the treatments administered to each group. Group A received the traditional writing method, and Group B received the word processing method of instruction.

Findings

At the conclusion of the semester a posttest, Remmers' Attitude Scale, Form B, was administered to ascertain attitude. A posttest, Inman's Cognitive Achievement Test, was administered to ascertain cognitive achievement.

Data from the posttests were analyzed using the one-way analysis of variance technique. No statistically significant differences between the treatment groups were revealed on the variables of attitude toward the course and cognitive achievement on the objective posttest in business communications. Therefore, two of the null hypotheses, Ho_1 and Ho_3, could not be rejected as a result of the effects of the experimental treatment.

Mean scores from the letter writing test problems were analyzed using the one-way analysis of variance technique. A statistical significance was revealed in that Treatment Group B, using the word processing method, showed better letter writing skills. Therefore, the null hypothesis, Ho_2, was rejected as a result of the experimental treatment.

Conclusions

To the extent that the data and findings resulting from this research study are valid and representative of students enrolled in a college level Business Communications course, the following conclusions may be drawn.

Since there was no significant difference between treatment groups relative to attitude toward the course, it may be concluded that there will not be a differential effect upon the attitude toward the course by students as a result of being taught business communications by the traditional writing method or the word processing method.

Since there was a significant difference between treatment groups on the combined mean scores of the letter writing test problems, it may be concluded that teaching the word processing method results in higher cognitive achievement on letter writing tests than teaching by the traditional writing method.

Since there was no significant difference between treatment groups relative to the cognitive achievement objective posttest, it may be concluded that there will not be a differential effect upon the cognitive achievement on an objective test as a result of being taught business communications by the traditional writing method or by the word processing method.

Recommendations

In view of the findings and conclusions of this study, the following recommendation is presented:

The the word processng method should be offered more in the classroom to teach writing in business communications because this is the method which brings about the most cognitive achievement on letter writing tests.

Discussion

The word processing method should be offered more in the classroom to teach business communications because this is an important cognitive achievement for students going into the business world.

Students could be permitted to select the method they prefer to use in the classroom, the traditional writing method or the word processing method.

There possibly was a difference in attitude, but the instrument was not capable of measuring that difference.

Problems for Further Study

Suggestions for further study of business communications have presented themselves to the researcher during this investigation. These include:

1. The study could be replicated to ascertain whether the results would be the same.

2. Further studies could be conducted to ascertain different procedures for teaching the word processing method.

3. Further studies could be conducted to develop better procedures, methods, or processes for evaluation of the letter writing test problems to increase precision.

4. Further study of the possibility of evaluating the actual dictation from recorded media might prove to be more economical for an institution, since transcription of the communications is either expensive or time-consuming for a transcription class.

5. Follow up studies could be conducted to ascertain which students using which method find the course in business communications to be most helpful in the job situation.

6. Further study could be conducted to measure efficiency of instruction (teaching both business writing principles and dictation) gained by teaching the word processing method.

7. Further study could be conducted to refine a test for attitude.

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